

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
HUMAN SERVICES
Fiscal Year 2007

The Amherst Community Services Department provides a variety of services to Amherst families and the Amherst community. During FY 05, the Community Services Department's responsibilities had increased significantly; during August 2005, the Director of Community Services was appointed staff liaison to the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, and when the Town was notified it had been designated a Mini-Entitlement community by the State Department of Housing and Community Development, the Director of Community Services also became responsible for submitting the Town's application to the State for Community Development Block Grant funds. During FY 06, the Director became responsible for managing the Town's FY 05 Community Development Block Grant.

The Director of Community Services continues to 1. provide the community with childcare/early education information, especially regarding the availability of tuition assistance for low-income families, 2. administer Town appropriations to human service agencies, 3. provide emergency assistance to low-income individuals and families, using interest from the Alfred Field Charitable Trust Fund, 4. edit the Annual Town Report, 5. assess community needs with respect to childcare and human services, 6. develop new programs that respond to community priorities, 7. work collaboratively with numerous committees and groups that provide important services to the Amherst community and provide staff assistance to the Community Development Committee (formerly the Human Services Funding Committee).

HOUSING

The Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee's major responsibility is to increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income Amherst individuals and families. In 1989, the Town acquired a parcel of land, referred to as "Olympia Drive," mainly for open space preservation. Approximately six acres of this parcel were reserved for the development of affordable housing. A joint development plan with the University of Massachusetts had been under discussion. When the University made it known that they did not wish to proceed with a cooperative project, the Housing Partnership and Director of the Community Services Department began planning for the construction of affordable housing. During FY 07 it became apparent that since the University owns the road that provides frontage for the proposed development, the Town lacks the legal frontage necessary to comply with zoning regulations. In addition, there is no agreement with the University regarding maintenance of the road. The Town Manager is hesitant to begin an affordable housing project on Olympia Drive until these issues are resolved.

The Housing Partnership supported a request to the Community Preservation Act Committee for funding to support a mortgage subsidy program that would provide deferred loans to low- and moderate-income households to purchase homes in Amherst. The Committee requested funding for three \$50,000 loans, to be paid back to the Town upon sale or transfer of the property. Repaid funds would be placed in a trust fund for future use by low- and moderate-income households. This CPA request was voted by Town Meeting.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

During the summer of FY 07, the Town was notified by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) that its request of \$600,000 was approved for the following activities:

Amherst Housing Authority - 11 units of new rental housing: \$350,000

The Amherst Housing Authority will lease the land to a private non-profit developer for the construction of 11 units of affordable rental housing on Main Street, in the East Amherst Village Center. This project has been consistently supported by the Amherst Select Board, the Community Preservation Act Committee, the Planning Department, and Amherst Town Meeting.

Family Outreach of Amherst to provide a Family Service Director of Community Services: \$66,912

This program will help families obtain resources, develop supportive connections and reduce social isolation and improve access to services that will promote the healthy psycho-social and emotional development of Amherst youth. Support will be provided to families with children attending grades 6 – 12.

Childcare Tuition Assistance: \$75,000

The Town received \$75,000 to continue to provide childcare subsidies for low- and moderate-income households with parents working or attending school.

The Community Services Department began program implementation of this program during the fall of FY 07 by responding to a series of special conditions and completing an environmental review of each activity for the above activities.

As part of the Town's FY 05 Community Development Block Grant, the Town provided funding for the design phase of a renovation project of kitchens at Chestnut Court Apartments, a disabled and elderly housing development owned by the Amherst Housing Authority. During the fall of FY 07, the Town responded to a request for proposals from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development for funding to complete this renovation project. The Town was notified during the spring of FY 07 that its application was approved and that the Town would receive approximately \$460,000.

During the fall of FY 07, the Town was notified that it no longer qualified for Community Development Block Grant Mini-Entitlement status. This means that the Town will no longer be entitled to receive CDBG funds, but would have to compete with other communities for funding, except that for FY 08 it would receive \$275,000 as a "transitioning-out" community. The Town, however, did apply for \$600,000.

CHILDCARE

During FY 07, The Town continued to provide childcare tuition assistance to families with funding from its FY 06 CDBG funds.

School Age Childcare: \$16,295

The Annual Town Meeting held in the spring of 2007 allocated \$16,295.00 to provide tuition assistance for low- and moderate-income families with children attending school-based after-school childcare programs. During FY 07, twelve families received support for sixteen children attending these programs. These funds helped parents pay for childcare services while they continued to work or attend educational institutions.

HUMAN SERVICES:

The Community Services Director and the Community Development Committee reviewed the report of the Human Rights Director, responding to several complaints about the operation of the Amherst Survival Center. The Committee recommended to the Town Manager that the FY 07 contract between the Town and the Survival Center contain several requirements that would lead to significant reorganization and improved service. These changes seem to have had a positive effect on the operation of this important community program.

As part of its charge, the Community Development Committee reviews proposals for funding from human service agencies and makes funding recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Meeting.

The Community Development Committee continued to face difficult decisions, as it was clear that recommendations by the Town Manager, Finance Committee and Select Board would greatly reduce the Town's support due to the continuing fiscal crisis. The Committee's priorities for funding continue to follow the guidelines established by the Select Board, namely: 1. emergency services: survival or critical, 2. preventive services and 3. information and referral. The Town Manager's budget recommendations for FY 08 included only \$25,000 for human service funding for FY 08. The Finance Committee supported this recommendation, but the Select Board's final recommendation to Town Meeting was \$66,000; the Community Development Committee's recommendation for funding was \$114,450. A minority vote supported a Town Meeting member's amendment to increase the Human Service fund 1% over the FY 06 appropriation. Town Meeting, after a long debate, supported the Select Board's recommendation and appropriated \$66,000 for FY 08.

The Community Development Committee recommendation to the Town Manager was as follows:

<u>Program Name</u>	<u>FY 08</u>
Amherst Survival Center	\$19,000
Big Brother Big Sister	\$14,000
Family Outreach of Amherst	\$13,000
Not Bread Alone	\$ 6,000
Men's Resource Center	\$ 5,900
Center for New Americans	\$ 4,200
Service Interfaith Cot Program	\$ 4,900

OTHER SERVICES

Requests for charitable funds continue to increase each year. The increased cost of rent, utilities, etc. makes it more difficult to serve all those in need.

The FY 06 Town Report was completed and copies distributed to the Select Board, the Finance Committee, the Town Manager, department heads, the School Department and the Jones Library. The editors of the Town Report thank members of the Information Technology Department for their help in printing the FY 06 Annual Town Report.

Roy Rosenblatt
Director of Community Services